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# CONSUMER BRANDED #HASHTAG ENGAGEMENT: CAN CREATIVITY IN TV ADVERTISING INFLUENCE HASHTAG ENGAGEMENT?

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## Abstract

This study examines the effects of creativity on consumer branded hashtag engagement in the context of TV advertising. Applying a qualitative design, two types of TV commercials were selected: humorous and warmth. This was followed by a quantitative study with 259 participants suggesting that novelty and relevance in TV advertisements together with brand familiarity are important drivers of consumer branded hashtag engagement. Consumer branded hashtag engagement, in turn, encourages consumers to share the advertisements online through different social media platforms. In addition, brand familiarity and the type of TV advertisement were found to be significant moderators. The results of this study highlight the pertinence of hashtags for consumer-brand engagement and contribute to a better understanding of consumer branded hashtag engagement in advertising. Guidance to advertisers on how to utilize creativity in TV advertisements to encourage consumer engagement with the brand is offered.

**Keywords:** hashtags; CBHE; engagement; creativity; TV advertisement

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This study examines the effects of creativity on consumer branded hashtag engagement in the context of TV advertising. Applying a qualitative design, two types of TV commercials were selected: humorous and warmth. This was followed by a quantitative study with 259 participants suggesting that novelty and relevance in TV advertisements together with brand familiarity are important drivers of consumer branded hashtag engagement. Consumer branded hashtag engagement, in turn, encourages consumers to share the advertisements online through different social media platforms. In addition, brand familiarity and the type of TV advertisement were found to be significant moderators. The results of this study highlight the pertinence of hashtags for consumer-brand engagement and contribute to a better understanding of consumer branded hashtag engagement in advertising. Guidance to advertisers on how to utilize creativity in TV advertisements to encourage consumer engagement with the brand is offered.

**Keywords:** hashtags; CBHE; engagement; creativity; TV advertisement

Advertisers are constantly trying to use different channels of communication to approach consumers more effectively and timely, and to increase their products' visibility and attractiveness. Especially with groundbreaking technological advances, such as social media, which have revolutionized the way consumers and companies communicate and interact with one another (Christodoulides, 2009). As such, advertisers are faced with several challenges as well as opportunities. One key challenge is to create branded content that not only breaks through the clutter of traditional media, but is also highly shareable online to increase 'eyeballs' and 'conversations'; i.e., 'engagement'. In the context of engagement, the inclusion of hashtags within advertisements on social media, such as Twitter, can be seen as an implicit prompt to encourage consumers to share advertisements online. Hashtags function as keywords included in a post following the # symbol (Swani, Brown & Milne, 2014; Zappavigna, 2011). This is a way to tag posts in order to provide a context for them, or to initiate a conversation in social media. Hashtags are increasingly being placed within TV advertisements as tactical tools to generate increased participation and to create a 'buzz' or a temporary brand community (Page, 2012; Swani *et al.*, 2014). The use of hashtags by brands has increased rapidly in recent years, resulting in higher levels of consumer engagement with just over 50% yearly growth in engagement-per-post rate in 2015 (Hitz, 2015; Simply Measured, 2015). The success of the hashtag incorporation in various promotional channels has led brand-related hashtags to become extremely popular, with 70% of the most frequently used hashtags in 2015 being brand-related (Simply Measured, 2015).

In order to initiate consumers' hashtag engagement in advertising, the first step is to create a worth-talking-about advertisement. For example, it has been found that advertisements that include creative elements and evoke positive emotions, such as joy or warmth, are better to sustain the viewer's interest and are subsequently more likely to be shared online (De Pelsmacker, Geuens & Van den Bergh, 2013; Spielmann & Richard, 2013; Teixeira, 2012;

Wang, 2006). This means that although sharing intent is driven by interpersonal needs, it is much more likely that advertisements which sustain the viewer's interest will be shared online, and the inclusion of branded hashtags in those advertisements appears to increase sharing opportunities through higher consumer engagement (Cox, 2015). This poses advertisers with a couple of dilemmas; to what extent should a brand focus on engagement rather than pure selling? Also, how should a brand arrive at the most appropriate balance between the two (i.e., engagement versus selling)? On the one hand advertising is an investment that needs a return to be viable, while on the other, engagement demands people's attention, and people regularly put up barriers to resist agency attempts at persuasion (Friestad & Wright, 1994). That creates the need for creative advertisements that can build an emotional 'roller coaster' for their viewers, which may increase the likelihood of higher engagement and return on investment (Teixeira, 2012).

One of the most popular contexts of engagement, which is the focus of this research, is social media. The introduction of Web 2.0 has led to the emergence of social networking sites (SNSs) such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Google+ allowing brand managers to communicate directly with consumers. This is achieved by adopting a consumer-centric approach, where brands can build and consolidate interactive, two-way relationships with the aim of ultimately engaging consumers. Engaged consumers often play a crucial role in improving a company's performance through word-of-mouth about its goods, services, and brand/s to other consumers, along with co-creating experiences and value for the brand (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). As a result, consumer engagement has become a priority in many branding strategies (Hollebeek, 2011a). Although hashtags, as a means of consumer engagement, have been incorporated in TV programs for a number of years to act as a backchannel for commentary (Highfield, Harrington & Bruns, 2013) and to generate increased participation

(Page, 2012), their inclusion in TV commercials is a relatively recent phenomenon (*e.g.*, see Levine, 2013; Marketing Land, 2013) and, as such, remains largely under-researched.

To date, the research published in the area of consumer brand engagement (CBE) is mainly exploratory in nature with little empirical validation (Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie, 2014). Thus, there is still a lot of uncertainty as to whether CBE is fully understood by both academics and practitioners (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). In particular, hashtags, as CBE facilitators, have not been investigated to date, and this, despite the popularity of and interest in branded hashtags in advertising. Thus, the purpose of this study is to develop and test a new integrated conceptual model assessing the relationship between consumer engagement and branded hashtags in TV advertising. In particular, this study focuses on (1) how different dimensions of advertising creativity encourage consumer branded hashtag engagement (CBHE), (2) whether consumers' familiarity with the brand can influence these relationships, and (3) if this type of engagement affects consumers' intention to share the advertisement through various social media platforms. To the researchers' knowledge, this is the first study in branded hashtag engagement not only in the context of TV advertising but in general. Thus, this research provides insights and a deeper understanding of the new phenomenon of branded hashtags and offers guidance to advertisers on how to more likely trigger consumers' engagement with their brand.

## **HASHTAGS**

Hashtags were created in 2007 by Chris Messina, a social technology expert, with the aim of online interactions and/or discussions regarding Barcamp on Twitter, a technology conference that spans worldwide (Doctor, 2013; Messina, 2007a, 2007b). In 2010, Twitter launched their 'Promoted Trends' advertising product (Twitter, 2013) offering brands the opportunity to increase the reach, and engagement around focal branded hashtags campaigns. Users can search and view Tweets or posts written about a certain topic by clicking on a hashtag (Page,

2012) and join conversations around topics of interest. Hashtags are no longer confined to Twitter and are increasingly incorporated across multiple touch points or channels, such as Instagram and Facebook.

Despite their growing popularity, hashtags have been restrained until recently to online environments. This nascent field of enquiry has resulted in a limited amount of academic literature published to date, yielding limited insights into consumers' hashtags usage and their impact on brands. The embryonic hashtag literature identified has predominantly scrutinized the use of hashtags related to certain televised events such as Barack Obama's presidential election (Zappavigna, 2011), the Arab Spring (Skinner, 2011), or the Eurovision (Highfield *et al.*, 2013) as well as social movements such as Occupy Wall Street (Gleason, 2013), whereby hashtags have been utilized to rally users around a cause. Consequently, broadcasters have quickly adapted to this shift in consumer behavior by integrating hashtags in their TV programs as a tool to generate increased participation (Page, 2012), audiencing (Highfield *et al.*, 2013) and/or information sharing (Gleason, 2013). The integration of hashtags in TV programs demonstrates the growing interest of broadcasters in assembling, interacting with and potentially tracking and analyzing audiences around their programming (Highfield *et al.*, 2013). In a similar manner, advertisers incorporate branded hashtags in their TV advertisements, which also act as 'cross-channel connectors', allowing brands to link different social media discussions to their campaigns and to further facilitate audience engagement. The following section provides a review of CBE and the theoretical base of this emerging branding phenomenon, followed by the development of the research hypotheses.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

## **Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE)**

Consumer engagement has been part of the marketing landscape for years, though its current meaning largely derives from a technology-led paradigm shift, empowering consumers to interact with brands and with other consumers through various social media and online communities. The concept of ‘consumer engagement’ started gaining attention in the literature relatively recently, originating with a research stream on brand communities (e.g. Cova & White, 2010; Fournier & Lee, 2009; Schau, Muñiz & Arnould, 2009). This research stream has used the term ‘engagement’ or ‘engage’ to encapsulate the fostering of relationships and creation of successful brand communities that can provide powerful returns and increase profitability (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Fournier & Lee, 2009). Although consumer engagement is widely used and measured by practitioners, there is still little consensus on what the most appropriate definition of consumer engagement is or how to measure it (Maslowska, Malthouse & Collinger, 2016; Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010). Marketers often relate ‘consumer engagement’ to loyalty, sales and emotional investment (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). Similarly, in the academic literature consumer engagement has been linked to loyalty intentions (e.g. Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014), emotional bonding (e.g. Brodie *et al.*, 2013), and customer analytics (Bijmolt *et al.*, 2010). However, it is only recently that the marketing literature has started to devote attention to ‘consumer engagement’ as a distinct concept worthy of scholarly investigation (e.g., Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010).

Consumer engagement can be defined as “a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships” (Brodie *et al.*, 2011, p. 260). Based on this conceptualization consumer engagement is context-dependent and, similarly to how communications work in general, consumer engagement may be seen as a multidimensional concept, which comprises of three dimensions: cognition, emotion and behavior (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014).



Though the concept of ‘consumer engagement’ identifies the ‘who’ or ‘subject’ of the engagement, which is the consumer, it does not identify the ‘with what’ or ‘object’ of the engagement, which in the marketing discipline can be the brand, the company, the product or the service (Hollebeek, 2011a). The ‘consumer brand engagement’ (CBE) concept, which focuses on the brand as the object of consumer engagement, has predominantly emerged in the literature from the works of Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi (2012), Hollebeek et al. (2011a, 2011b, 2014) and Brodie et al. (2011, 2013), and is defined as “a consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions” (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014, p. 154). This definition of CBE places particular emphasis on direct brand interactions in relation to the three dimensions of consumer engagement; cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement.

*Cognitive brand engagement* is related to cognitive investment and refers to “a consumer's level of brand-related thought processing and elaboration in a particular consumer/brand interaction” (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014, p. 154). It has been found that in relation to online consumer engagement, the cognitive aspect of engagement is mainly initiated by consumers’ need to share information and experiences about the brand (Brodie et al., 2013). More explicitly, in the context of brand communities, potential consumers might look for brand-related information within that community, which can lead them to be cognitively engaged with the brand’s webpage content (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). *Emotional or affective brand engagement* includes positive reactions that can develop bonds with a brand and encourage consumers’ willingness to be involved in a consumer-brand interaction (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2014; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). This means that when consumers are emotionally engaged they become more attached to their chosen brands and are willing to invest both time and effort (Hollebeek, 2011b). This leads to higher engagement with the brand or the brand community, as many customers experience perceived relational benefits (Gummerus *et al.*,

2012). Finally, *behavioral or activation brand engagement* refers to the time, effort and energy consumers are willing to invest in a particular consumer-brand interaction (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). This dimension goes beyond the concept of involvement as it includes consumers' willingness to interact with the brand and with different brand community members (Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). All three dimensions of CBE are essential for reaching positive outcomes for the brand (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004).

In addition to the dimensionality of CBE, it is important to examine the context where engagement takes place. Based on the existing marketing and communication literature, the advertising engagement context through social media is of increasing importance in marketing (*e.g.*, Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Kilger & Romer, 2007; Wang, 2006), and is the focus of this study. The importance of consumer engagement in advertising is also reflected in the recent framework of engagement that Interactive Advertising Bureau (2014) published, placing the three dimensions of engagement (cognitive, emotional/affective and physical/behavioral) at the core of advertising metrics. Many advertisers have realized that consumer engagement is a significant antecedent of brand choice and consequently try to communicate advertising messages through different media types (*e.g.*, TV advertisements) with the strategic aim to elicit engagement (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010; Wang, 2006). One of the most popular and effective ways to elicit brand engagement through advertising is by the inclusion of hashtags (*e.g.*, TV or, print advertisements or out-of-home materials). In that sense, brands use hashtags as a CBE tool in order to communicate brand value to existing or potential consumers through both traditional media and online environments (such as websites, SNSs and other computer-mediated communication systems). This enables advertisers to break through the clutter ultimately impacting branded hashtag engagement (Gambetti *et al.*, 2012). As such, the # hashtag symbol has become increasingly important to many campaigns in pursuit of CBE.

Although, hashtags are now used by many brands as a marketing communicational and promotional tool in TV advertisements, no research to date has focused on hashtags in the context of TV advertising. Thus, the focus on this paper is to integrate hashtags with CBE, and to introduce ‘Consumer Branded Hashtag Engagement’ (CBHE) which, following the CBE definition by Hollebeek *et al.* (2014), is defined here as ‘*a consumers’ positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral #hashtag activity during, or related, to focal consumer/brand interactions*’. Additionally, this study focuses on the specific context of TV advertisements, by looking at the different dimensions of creativity in TV commercials and how these may potentially affect CBHE. The next section introduces the concept of advertising creativity to complete the picture given that the first stage of engagement is to draw people’s attention.

### **Advertising Creativity**

Advertising creativity is a complex area of research and not easy to encapsulate in a single definition (Till & Baack, 2005), yet it can often be pivotal to the success of a campaign (Heath, Nairn & Bottomley, 2009; Kilgour & Koslow, 2009; Zinkhan, 1993). Advertising creativity has been traditionally viewed in relation to terms such as ability, cognition, effectiveness, imagination, innovation and problem solving (Bell, 1992; Koslow, Sasser & Riordan, 2003). Definitions abound but there is a general agreement that advertising creativity embraces ‘divergence’ (innovation and originality) as well as relevance (Ang, Lee & Leong, 2007; Ang & Low, 2000; Im & Workman, 2004; Kim, Han & Yoon, 2010; Mednick, 1962; Smith, *et al.*, 2007; Unsworth, 2001). More specifically, relevance (Smith & Yang, 2004) distinguishes advertising creativity from wider artistic creativity (Barron, 1969; De Bono, 1971) given its purpose is to offer solutions to business and consumer market problems. Both elements of originality and relevance are also reflected in the generic term of creativity by Sternberg &

Lubart, (1999, p.3) who define creativity as “the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e., original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e., useful, adaptive concerning task constraints)”. However, advertising creativity in particular, is an atypical form of creativity given that both novelty and relevance must operate in a context where the synthesis and elaboration of the message is obvious to the target market (Baack, Wilson & Till, 2008; Heiser, Sierra & Torres, 2008; Smith & Yang, 2004). It is clear that although novelty might be the central element of creativity, creative advertisements also need to be appropriate and well-crafted (Lehnert, Till & Ospina, 2014). All of these elements are reflected in the three dimensions of advertising creativity, which are novelty, resolution, and elaboration (*e.g.*, Heiser *et al.*, 2008; Lehnert *et al.*, 2014; O’Quin & Besemer, 1989; Smith & Yang, 2004). *Novelty* refers to the originality and uniqueness of the advertisement, *resolution* refers to the appropriateness, relevance and meaningfulness of the advertisement (*e.g.*, how relevant and logical it is), and *elaboration* refers to the synthesis of the advertisement (*e.g.*, how well-crafted it is, how well built the message is) (Heiser *et al.*, 2008; O’Quin & Besemer, 1989). Each of the three dimensions (novelty, resolution and elaboration) interacts with each other to formulate the divergent aspect of a creative advertisement (Lehnert *et al.*, 2014). The extent to which each of the dimensions contributes to the perceived creativity of the advertisement determines how divergent the advertisement is or not and consequently how effective or not it is (Kover, Goldberg & James, 1995; Lehnert *et al.*, 2014). This creates a challenge to advertisers as it is vital to understand and choose the appropriate creativity dimension (or a combination of the creative dimensions) that can result in a successful communication strategy (Heiser *et al.*, 2008).

Siefert *et al.* (2009) suggest that when it comes to driving consumer response, especially in the online environment, advertisements that can engage consumers appear to be the most effective ones. Creative advertisements can evoke several responses in the viewer: cognitive, affective and behavioral in nature (Haberlan & Dacin, 1992; Heiser *et al.*, 2008). For example,

novel, meaningful and well-made advertisements that create a connection with the viewer, can more easily be recalled and create favorable feelings both for the advertisement and the brand (Dahlén, 2005; Heiser *et al.*, 2008). In the advertisement engagement literature, it has been supported that advertisements which can provoke favorable feelings, have a higher probability of encouraging consumer engagement (Seamon, Marsh & Brody, 1984; Wang, 2006). In particular, Wang (2006) states including the unexpected element in an advertisement (e.g. novelty) can enhance consumers' engagement. Additionally, it has been argued that consumer engagement is the result of perceived relevance in the advertisement and without this customers cannot be involved with the advertisement or the brand (Spielmann & Richard, 2013). It is more likely that consumers' interest will be captured when the advertisement is appropriate and relevant to them (Wang, 2006). Finally, divergent advertisements are more challenging to interpret and decode, thus the elaboration dimension of creativity is very important to achieve understanding and consequently consumer engagement (Smith & Yang, 2004).

There is no prior published study that examines the link between the creativity dimensions and CBE. However, based on the above literature, it is to be expected that the higher the dimensions of creativity in an advertisement, the higher the probability that consumers will be involved in branded hashtag engagement. As such the following hypotheses are offered:

**H1a:** Novelty in the creativity of TV advertisements positively influences CBHE.

**H1b:** Resolution in the creativity of TV advertisements positively influences CBHE.

**H1b:** Elaboration in the creativity of TV advertisements positively influences CBHE.

### **Brand Familiarity**

Aside from creativity in advertisements, it is very important to examine consumers' familiarity with the brand in the context of CBE because the likelihood of including a brand in a conversational set is much higher when consumers are more familiar with that brand (Nam &

Kannan, 2014). Brand familiarity captures consumers' experience with a brand; these experiences might be either direct or indirect and reflect the level of consumers' knowledge structures that exist in their memory and are associated with the brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Campbell & Keller, 2003; Kent & Allen, 1994). These experiences might be accumulated over time by different sources such as prior usage or purchase of the brand, family or friends who are familiar with the brand and they talk about it, advertisements for a brand or other marketing communications efforts and the press that expose consumers to brands (Campbell & Keller, 2003; Nam & Kannan, 2014; Sundaram & Webster, 1999). Familiarity with a brand increases over repeated exposures (Nam & Kannan, 2014) and influences consumers' purchase decisions (Hoyer & Brown, 1990), advertising recall (Kent & Allen, 1994), and purchase behavior (Baker *et al.*, 1986; Biswas, 1992). Based on Baker *et al.* (1986), brand familiarity can motivate consumers to think and include a brand in an evoked set, create positive affect and encourage behavioral interactions towards the brand. Thus, it is likely that brand familiarity will directly lead to great branded hashtag engagement.

Besides the direct link between brand familiarity and CBHE, it is expected that brand familiarity will moderate the relationship between creativity dimensions and CBHE. In the context of advertising brand familiarity has been found to be an important moderator in competitive advertising interference (Kent & Allen, 1994), advertising repetition effects (Campbell & Keller, 2003), international advertising strategies (Pae, Samiee & Tai, 2002) and brand message consistency (Delgado-Ballester, Navarro & Sicilia, 2012). The effort and time consumers need to invest in information processing is much less for familiar rather than for unfamiliar brands (Biswas, 1992; Kent & Allen, 1994). This means that consumers can have easier recall and use information for familiar brands which makes them more likable (Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2012). In line with this reasoning and in the context of advertising it is expected that when a consumer is exposed to a creative advertisement it is more likely that he or she

would be involved in a branded hashtag engagement when he or she is more familiar with the brand. The easier recall of the brand will make this process (from watching a creative commercial to engagement through hashtags) more effortless and natural. Thus, the following hypotheses are suggested:

**H2:** Brand familiarity positively influences CBHE.

**H3a:** Brand familiarity moderates the relationship between creativity - novelty and CBHE.

**H3b:** Brand familiarity moderates the relationship between creativity - resolution and CBHE.

**H3C:** Brand familiarity moderates the relationship between creativity - elaboration and CBHE.

### **Social Media Share Intent**

One of the ultimate goals of any company that tries to enhance brand engagement is to increase its share on social media by encouraging consumers to pass on their branded content, including their advertisements. It has been found that one of the key drivers for sharing online information is a consumers' need to share the affection and thoughts they have towards an object (*e.g.*, a brand) (Ho & Dempsey, 2010). Social media provide the perfect platform for consumers to actively create content and to share it with others (Lee & Ma, 2012; Szabo & Huberman, 2010). Share intent is defined here as 'the consumers' intention to share advertisements from a brand in the future in different social media platforms'. In the advertising context, it is argued that although the advertisement might be very well tailored, viewers might still not be willing to share it (Teixeira, 2012). That is, even if a viewer likes an advertisement, this does not mean it will automatically translate that liking to an intention to share it on social media.

Consumer engagement as well as brand-related user-generated content can lead to positive brand-related outcomes (Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann, 2005; Christodoulides, Jevons

& Bonhomme, 2012). Lee and Ma (2012) found that social media sharing experience (for example, being engaged in Twitter, Facebook and/or Instagram) can lead to higher intentions of sharing content online. In the same manner, consumers who are willing to be more actively engaged with a brand through hashtags, would be more willing to share the advertisements of this brand in different social media platforms. The inclusion of hashtags in advertisements can be seen as an implicit prompt to encourage consumers to share the advertisement online through different social media. In sum, sharing intent is driven by engagement needs (cognitive, emotional and behavioral), but only advertisements that sustain the viewer's interest will be shared online, whilst the use of branded hashtag appears to increase sharing intent. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

**H4:** CBHE positively influences sharing intent.

Figure 1 provides the proposed conceptual model with the main variables and hypothesized relationships identified amongst them. The model suggests that the perceived creativity of an advertisement may provoke a response in the viewer, leading to branded hashtag engagement. This relationship is expected to be enhanced when consumers are more familiar with the brand. Finally, it is expected that higher levels of CBHE will lead to higher intentions to share advertisements from this brand.

PLACE FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Procedure of the Qualitative Phase**

A two-step approach was used to undertake this study. Initially, and for the purposes of selecting the two TV commercials, in-depth interviews with 15 consumers were conducted. These were people who actively used hashtags and branded hashtags across a range of social



networks, including Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, and who were purposely selected according to the criterion of theoretical sampling (Glaser, 1978). The aim was to develop a wide coverage of TV advertisements under investigation by including a diversified range of brands and types of hashtags, so that a selection of the TV commercials would be based on the high levels of branded hashtag engagement. To achieve that, the first section of the interview guide was designed to uncover consumers' branded hashtag usage across various social networking sites including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The participants were asked to complete a diary two weeks prior to the interview, offering an unprompted overview of their hashtag and branded hashtag usage.

The second section of the interview guide was designed to classify various types of branded hashtags TV advertisements using the mapping technique. This technique allowed the researchers to understand the perceived similarities and differences amongst branded hashtags in TV advertisements (Risvik, McEwan & Rodbotten, 1997). The output of this projective technique was a perceptual map whereby participants were required to rank the hashtag TV advertisements on an axis from most engaging to least engaging, by uncovering the drivers of branded hashtag engagement. The researchers then prompted the participants to explain their reasoning behind each cluster, and concluded the interview by assessing what elements of the TV commercials led to branded hashtag engagement and subsequent consequences for such engagement. Based on this process, two TV commercials emerged as the most engaging, i.e. with the highest levels of either humor or warmth dimensions. Those were the Three UK Mobile's #danceponydance representing the 'humorous' TV advertisement and the John Lewis' #bearandhare representing the 'warmth' TV advertisement (see appendix 1 and 2)<sup>i</sup>.

### **Types of Emotional Appeals in TV Advertisements (*Post Hoc* Analysis)**

The two TV advertisements selected for this project were, therefore, the outcome of the qualitative phase of the study. The two most engaging TV advertisements (Three UK and John Lewis) are different in nature, evoking two different emotional appeals to the viewers; humor and warmth. Thus, it was decided to compare them and perform a *post hoc* multi-group analysis, exploring any significant differences between the two types of advertisements. Both humor and warmth are emotional appeals that can evoke different emotions in consumers and are frequently used in advertisements to generate positive responses towards the brand, or to improve recall of the brand (Cline, Altsech & Kellaris, 2003; De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2013; Rossiter & Percy, 1997; Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2010). Humor in advertisements can be defined as an emotional appeal that intends to make viewers laugh (De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2013). Humor in advertisements has been used for many years by advertisers in order to improve the effectiveness of communication and attract the interest of the viewers (Eisend, Plagemann & Sollwedel, 2014; Main, Argo & Huhmann, 2004). Warmth in advertisements can be defined as an emotional appeal that evokes feelings of friendship, empathy, tenderness, love and coziness (Aaker, Stayman & Hagerty, 1986; De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2013; Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2010). Warmth in advertising has not been as extensively researched as humor, however, it has been found to improve positive attitudes towards the advertisement and the brand (De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2013; Geuens, De Pelsmacker & Faseur, 2011) and even increase purchase intention (Aaker *et al.*, 1986). Although, advertising research shows that both emotional appeals can create positive responses and favorable attitudes amongst viewers, the magnitude of this effect may vary leading to different communication results (De Pelsmacker & Geuens, 1996; Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 1999). Consequently, this study explores whether the relationships of the conceptual model vary significantly between the two different types of advertisements, i.e. humorous versus warmth TV advertisements.

## **Sample**

The second step of the research used a sample of 259 participants (humorous advertisement N=131, and warmth advertisement N=128). The questionnaire was seeded on Twitter targeting consumers engaging with branded hashtag activity. As the survey targeted branded hashtag users, an online questionnaire using Twitter as a platform, where hashtag activity is mainly focused, was considered to be the most suitable method to recruit this sample. Thus, potential respondents were sent a direct message containing a brief explanation of what the survey entailed and the web link to the questionnaire. Participants were asked to watch the advertisement and then subsequently answer the questions. These advertisements were randomized to ensure both advertisements were equally shown. 655 survey invitations were sent out and 322 responses were counted. Of those 259 were fully completed, thus the total response rate for the survey was effectively 39.5%. The participants were equally spread between males (50.6%) and females (49.4%), with the majority being in the 25 - 34 age group, having a university level education and earning a circa equivalent of \$US60,000 per year.

## **Measures**

Each construct was measured using scales drawn from the literature and comprised of multiple items (See Table 1). Advertising creativity was adapted from O'Quin and Besemer (1989) and brand familiarity was adapted from Machleit, Allen and Madden (1993). Both of these constructs were measure on a bipolar scale ranging from -3 to +3. CBHE was adapted from Hollebeek *et al.* (2014) and share intent was adapted from Lee and Ma (2012). Both of these constructs were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'strongly disagree', to 7 'strongly agree'.

PLACE TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Convergent and discriminant validity tests were conducted. As shown in table 2, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha for all measures are greater than .70 and average variance extracted is greater than .50, exceeding the recommended threshold (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2009). To test for Common Method Variance (CMV) Harman's single factor analysis was conducted which confirmed that CMV is not a problem, as the single factor from the factor analysis explained 26.04% of the variance, which is much lower than the 50% cut-off point proposed for CMV (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Finally, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed on the measurement model to ensure convergent validity. The results indicate a very good fit after deleting some items, following the procedures proposed by Hair *et al.* (2009). Overall, the  $\chi^2/df$  ratio is 2.68 ( $p < .05$ ), comparative fit index (CFI) equal to .93, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) is .91, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is .05, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) equal to .08 (Hair *et al.*, 2009; Kline, 2005).

PLACE TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

### **Manipulation Check**

As mentioned above, the two TV commercials selected in the qualitative process represent two different types of advertisement: humor and warmth. In order to explore any differences between these two types of advertisements and for reasons of parsimony, a manipulation check was performed using measurements for humor adapted from Duncan and Nelson (1985) (*e.g.*, 'The advertisement was funny', 'The advertisement was more serious than funny (r)') and measured in a 7-point Likert scale. The warmth emotional appeal was measured by the question 'I felt warmth when watching this advert' in a 7-point Likert scale. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) of a humor manipulation test revealed that there is a significant difference between the two advertisements ( $F = 417.812$ ,  $p < .000$ ), with 3 Mobile been perceived as more humorous ( $M = 5.46$ ) than John Lewis advertisement ( $M = 2.83$ ). In the same manner warmth emotional

appeal manipulation test revealed that there is a significant difference between the two advertisements ( $F = 90.920, p < .0000$ ), with John Lewis been perceived warmer ( $M = 3.65$ ) than 3 Mobile advertisement ( $M = 1.91$ ).

## RESULTS

To test if there are significant differences of the advertising creativity dimensions between the two types of TV advertisements, a repeated measures analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was performed. For both types of TV advertisements novelty is the most important dimension of creativity, followed by elaboration for the humorous TV advertisement and resolution for the warmth TV advertisement. The within-subject effect of the three creativity dimensions is significant [ $F(1.769, 126.432) = 80.713, p < .001, \eta^2 = .239$ ] and the three creativity dimensions can significantly explain 16.3% of the differences between the two TV advertisements [ $F(1.769, 78.134) = 49.880, p < .001, \eta^2 = .163$ ]. Advertising creativity in total is found to be more significant in the humorous TV advertisement ( $M = 4.8$ ) than the warmth TV advertisement ( $M = 3.6$ ). More specifically, novelty ( $M = 5.1$ ) followed by elaboration ( $M = 4.9$ ) and then resolution ( $M = 4.3$ ) are more important in humorous rather than in warmth TV advertisements ( $M = 4.8, M = 2.7$  and  $M = 3.4$  respectively). Notably, for the warmth type of TV advertisements, novelty is much more important than revolution and elaboration (See Figure 2).

### PLACE FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

To test the hypotheses, a Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was performed with AMOS v.20. The structural model is deemed acceptable with  $\chi^2/df = 2.35$  ( $p = .021$ ), GFI = .99, CFI = .98, TLI = .904, RMSEA = .07 and SRMR = .02. Most of the proposed hypotheses are confirmed apart from Hypothesis 1c (that elaboration in advertising creativity positively influences CBHE) and Hypothesis 3b (that brand familiarity moderates the relationship between resolution and CBHE) (see Table 3). The overall model, including both TV

advertisements, showed that two dimensions of creativity, novelty ( $\beta=.38$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and resolution ( $\beta=.13$ ,  $p<.05$ ), together with brand familiarity ( $\beta=.14$ ,  $p<.05$ ) can influence positively CBHE, which in turn can significantly ( $\beta=.68$ ,  $p<.001$ ) influence share intent. Additionally, brand familiarity is found to strengthen the relationship between novelty and CBHE ( $\beta=.19$ ,  $p<.01$ ), but to weaken the relationship between resolution and CBHE ( $\beta=-.14$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

To test for differences between the two types of TV advertisements, a multiple group analysis was performed. As table 3 shows, there are three significant differences between humorous and warmth TV advertisements. Firstly, resolution can influence CBHE in humorous TV advertisements ( $\beta=.38$ ,  $p<.001$ ), but it does not have a significant effect on warmth TV advertisements ( $z=2.92$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The second difference is found in the moderating effect of brand familiarity on the relationship between elaboration and CBHE ( $z=-2.38$ ,  $p<.01$ ). For the warmth TV advertisement, brand familiarity can strengthen this relationship ( $\beta=.21$ ,  $p<.05$ ), but this effect is not significant for the humorous type of TV advertisement. Finally, the relationship between CBHE and share intent is found to be significantly different in the two different TV advertisements ( $z=-3.278$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The positive influence of CBHE on share intent is found to be much stronger in the warmth ( $\beta=.75$ ,  $p<.001$ ) compared to the humorous type of TV advertisement ( $\beta=.58$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Apart from those differences the results show that novelty can influence CBHE for both types of TV advertisements and brand familiarity can strengthen this relationship without significant differences between the two types of TV advertisements.

PLACE TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

## DISCUSSION

The results show that the more novel (original and unusual) the advertisement incorporating the hashtag is, the more likely it is for consumers to engage with the brand being advertised through the use of hashtag/s. This finding is consistent for humorous, as well as for warmth advertisements that include a hashtag, and is line with past research highlighting the importance of original content in encouraging consumers' engagement (*e.g.*, Heiser *et al.*, 2008; Dahlén, 2005; Wang, 2006). In the same manner, the more relevant and appropriate the advertisement is received, the more likely the consumers will engage with the advertised brand through hashtags. This is particularly important in today's over-communicated world where advertisements are competing for consumers' time and attention (*e.g.*, Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012) and where relevance is a pre-requisite to cognitive, affective and behavioral engagement. Contrary to expectation (and hypothesis) how well made and meticulous the advertisement is, does not seem to have a significant effect on CBHE. This may be because both selected advertisements were produced to high standard and were aired by national television stations. Elaboration may have been found to be important in the case of user-generated advertisements (*e.g.*, Berthon, Pitt & Campbell, 2008) where the quality of production may not match that of professionally-made advertisements.

In addition to this, the findings revealed that consumers who are more familiar with the brand being advertised are more likely to engage with that brand through hashtags. This is in line with the proposed hypothesis here as well as with previous research suggesting a direct link between brand familiarity and consumer-brand related behaviors (*e.g.*, Baker *et al.*, 1986). Apart from this direct effect of brand familiarity on CBHE, it is also found that brand familiarity positively moderates the relationship between novelty and CBHE. This means that original, unique and unusual content in TV advertisements will lead consumers to be more engaged with the brand through hashtags, especially when they are familiar with the brand. Novel advertisements often lead to higher levels of recall toward the advertisement but not

necessarily toward the brand (Sheinin, Varki & Ashley, 2011; Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2012). The findings support this reasoning by showing that brand familiarity lessens the effort and time required by the consumer to engage through hashtags with the brand when this is led by unique TV advertisements. On the other hand, brand familiarity was found to negatively moderate the relationship between resolution and CBHE. This means that the more familiar consumers are with a brand, the weaker the influence of a relevant and appropriate advertisement will be on consumers' hashtags engagement. This is reasonable as the consumer's familiarity with the brand advertised negates the need for an appropriate and/or relevant advertisement. Familiarity means that consumers' previous experiences with and knowledge of the brand (Alba & Hutchison, 1987) establishes this relevance for the consumer that otherwise would need to be established by the advertisement in order to lead to higher CBHE.

The findings of the *post-hoc* analysis also indicate significant differences between the two advertisements (warmth versus humor) with regards to the following three relationships. Firstly, while resolution can influence CBHE in a humorous advertisement, this relationship is not significant in a warmth advertisement. In other words, logical elements of the advertisements are more pertinent to the humorous advertisement whereas in the warmth advertisement those are not important for consumer's engagement with the brand hashtag. Secondly, although in the general model, brand familiarity was not found to influence the relationship between elaboration and CBHE, when looking into the differences between the two advertisements, results indicate that in the warmth advertisement the relationship between elaboration and CBHE can benefit from consumer's brand familiarity. Warmth in TV advertisements can be intensified, leading to higher levels of positive valence, by how easily the viewer can relate to or sympathize with the plot (Aaker *et al.*, 1986). Thus, the clearer the synthesis of the advertisement is and the more familiar the viewer is with the brand (which



promotes his/her understanding of the background information and the plot), the more likely the consumer will engage with branded hashtags, especially for warmth advertisements. Finally, the relationship between CBHE and share intent is significantly higher in the warmth advertisement than in the humorous advertisement. This suggests that engagement with hashtags is more likely to translate into sharing when the advertisement carrying the hashtags evokes feelings of friendship, empathy, tenderness, love and/or coziness.

With evidence that hard sell advertising is declining, and consumers are increasingly rejecting traditional sales messages, this research emphasizes the importance for advertisers to create original and relevant branded content that wins the ‘hearts’ and ‘minds’ of consumers so as to encourage sharing this online. Current trends show an inexorable proliferation of the use of hashtags from consumers on different social media platforms. While brand managers are trying to utilize this form of engagement by including hashtags in their TV advertisements, no previous literature has empirically investigated this ‘new phenomenon’ of CBHE. This study deepens our understanding of, and highlights the role of, branded hashtag engagement in the context of TV advertising. More specifically, this research contributes to the literature on CBE by examining the role of advertising creativity in CBHE. Finally, this study sheds light on how different emotional appeals (warmth and humor) in advertising can create or intensify the connection between the consumer and the brand through hashtag engagement.

### **Managerial Implications**

The findings of this study offer important guidelines for advertisers to help optimize the use of their hashtags within TV advertisements with the view to elicit high levels of CBHE. Advertisers should aim to incorporate hashtags in their TV advertisements, and create content which can be perceived to be original and to ‘stand out’, as these are the ones most likely to lead to CBHE. To intensify this effect, novel and original advertisements should be directed to

viewers who are familiar with the brand, and more likely to be involved with branded hashtag engagement. Advertisers may also be encouraged to highlight the logical, appropriate and relevant elements of their advertisements, particularly in cases where the main appeal used is humor. Brand familiarity is also found to be an important antecedent to consumers' engagement with branded hashtags. Thus, advertisers are advised to consider targeting advertisements incorporating hashtags to more experienced brand users rather than to users with little or no experience of the brand, as they are less likely to engage with the hashtag. More experienced brand users should be also targeted where the aim of the advertisement is to evoke emotions such as empathy and warmth. In this case, advertisers should pay attention to the synthesis of the advertisement (apart from the originality) in order to enhance CBHE. On the other hand, for those users with little or no experience with the brand, advertisers should place more emphasis on creating logical and relevant TV advertisement to initiate CBHE. Finally, the study suggests that while CBHE in both warmth and humorous advertisements is likely to lead to share intent, such share intent is significantly higher for the warmth appeal. In cases where this is in line with the positioning and the values of the brand and where the aim is to increase sharing of the brand content, advertisers should prefer to use warmth rather than humor as an appeal.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Every care was taken in selecting the advertisements used as stimuli for this study, however, it has to be acknowledged that generalizability is limited when using one advertisement to represent each appeal type (warmth versus humor), despite their emergence from qualitative evaluation. Although the type of appeal was not the original focus of this research, *post hoc* analysis revealed interesting differences between the advertisements chosen to represent warmth and humor. Future research could extend the findings of the present study by

examining the inclusion of hashtags in various advertisements that employ a range of different appeals. Thirdly, the survey was conducted online and respondents were invited to watch a TV commercial, embedded into the survey, on their computers, tablets or cell phones. This condition may be different from where respondents would typically watch these advertisements, i.e. on their TVs. Brand familiarity was hypothesized and established as a moderator between the perceived creativity of the TV advertisement and CBHE. In respect to future work, research may examine other moderators such as situational (*e.g.*, access to internet or smartphone ownership) or personal (innovation adoption stage). More specifically, given the potential of hashtags to foster brand communities, future research may also wish to examine the role of brand community identification as a likely moderator in the relationships between creativity dimensions and CBHE and CBHE and sharing intent. Further investigation can also be directed to additional antecedents and consequences of CBHE using a number of advertisements, employing a range of emotional and rational appeals. While the focus of this paper is on hashtags incorporated in TV advertisements it would be interesting to see whether the above findings would be replicated when branded hashtags are included in other forms of content marketing (*e.g.* blogs, images) or even in user generated content, which is evidently a significant form of brand information for today's consumers. Finally, future research may also investigate the interaction of consecutive exposure to a TV advertisement incorporating a brand hashtag, with exposure to other forms of branded content bearing hashtag and the effect on CBE and sharing intent.

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<sup>i</sup> *Three UK* is a telecommunications and internet service provider operating in the United Kingdom as a subsidiary of Hutchison Whampoa. The advertisement can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ekr05T9Jaio>. The John Lewis Partnership is an employee-owned UK company which operates the leading *John Lewis* department stores and Waitrose supermarkets. The advertisement can be found at: <http://www.johnlewis.com/inspiration-and-advice/az-of-christmas/bear-and-hare> (Under the 'Watch the advert' section).

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## TABLES

**Table 1. Measurement.**

<b>Brand familiarity</b> (Adapted from Machleit, Allen and Madden, 1993)	Familiar - Unfamiliar Experienced - Inexperienced Knowledgeable - Unknowledgeable
<b>Creativity</b> (Adapted from O'Quin and Besemer, 1989)	<b>Novelty, original subscale</b> Overused – Fresh Predictable-Novel Usual-Unusual Unique-Ordinary (*) Original-Conventional (*) <b>Resolution, logical subscale</b> Illogical-Logical Makes sense-Senseless (*) Irrelevant-Relevant Appropriate-Inappropriate (*) Adequate-Inadequate (*) <b>Elaboration and synthesis, well-crafted subscale</b> Skillful-Bungling (*) Well-made-botched (*) Crude-Well-crafted Meticulous-Sloppy (*) Careless-Careful
<b>Consumer branded Hashtag engagement</b> (Adapted from Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie 2014)	<b>CBHE Cognitive processing</b> Using #danceponydance / #bearandhare would get me to think about Three Mobile/John Lewis I would think about Three Mobile/John Lewis if I used the branded hashtag #danceponydance/#bearandhare Using #danceponydance/#bearandhare would stimulate my interest to learn more about Three Mobile/John Lewis <b>CBHE Affection</b> I would feel very positive if I used the branded hashtag #danceponydance/#bearandhare in my Tweets Using the branded hashtag #danceponydance/ #bearandhare would make me happy I would feel good about Three Mobile/John Lewis if I used their branded hashtag #danceponydance / #bearandhare I would be proud to use the branded hashtag #danceponydance /#bearandhare in my Tweets <b>CBHE Activation</b> I would use the branded hashtag #danceponydance/#bearandhare in my Tweets more frequently compared to other branded- hashtags If I Tweeted about Three Mobile/John Lewis, I would use their branded hashtag #danceponydance /#bearandhare #danceponydance/#bearandhare is one of the branded hashtags I would use when I Tweet

<b>Sharing intent</b> (Adapted from Lee and Ma, 2012)	I intend to share advertisements from this brand in social media in the future I expect to share / retweet advertisements from this brand contributed by other users I plan to share advertisements from this brand in social media regularly
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**Table 2. Reliability scores.**

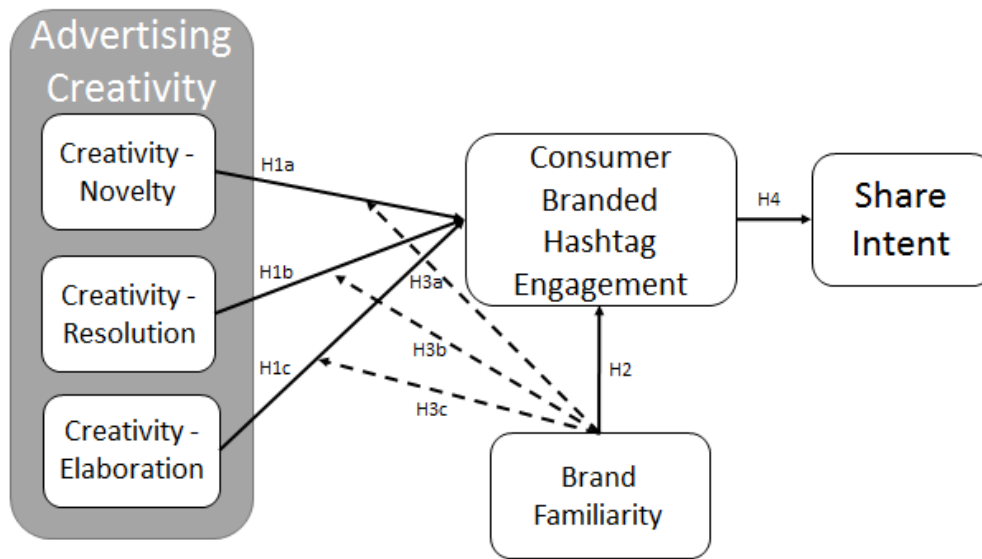
Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Items	Construct Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
<b>Humor</b>	.747	2	0.759	0.613
<b>Novelty</b>	.751	3	0.753	0.506
<b>Resolution</b>	.771	3	0.773	0.533
<b>Elaboration</b>	.863	3	0.871	0.693
<b>Creativity</b>	.741	7	0.946	0.656
<b>Brand familiarity</b>	.865	3	0.875	0.704
<b>CBHE - Cognitive</b>	.797	3	0.824	0.624
<b>CBHE - Affective</b>	.928	4	0.929	0.766
<b>CBHE - Activity</b>	.821	3	0.834	0.633
<b>CBHE</b>	.921	7	0.972	0.776
<b>Sharing intent</b>	.877	3	0.885	0.722

**Table 3. Results of SEM.**

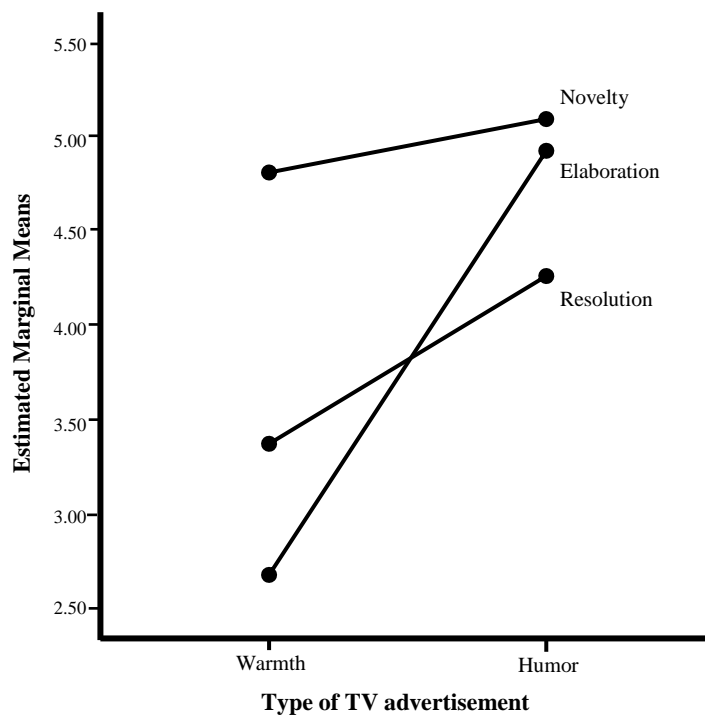
	Estimate	Warmth	Humorous	z-score
(H1a) CBHE ← Novelty	<b>.383***</b>	.321**	.274**	-0.452
(H1b) CBHE ← Resolution	<b>.133*</b>	<b>-.022</b>	<b>.377***</b>	<b>2.92***</b>
(H1c) CBHE ← Elaboration	-.105	-.064	-.058	-0.016
(H2) CBHE ← Brand Familiarity	<b>.136*</b>	.196*	.098	-1.076
(H3a) CBHE ← BF_x_Novelty	<b>.187**</b>	.240*	.202*	-0.548
(H3b) CBHE ← BF_x_Resolution	<b>-.143*</b>	-.096	.071	1.144
(H3c) CBHE ← BF_x_Elaboration	.006	<b>.208*</b>	<b>-.182</b>	<b>-2.384**</b>
(H4) Share Intent ← CBHE	<b>.682***</b>	<b>.752***</b>	<b>.584***</b>	<b>-3.273***</b>

Notes: \*\*\* p-value < 0.001; \*\* p-value < 0.01; p-value < 0.05

## FIGURES



**Figure 1.** Conceptual model in Consumer Branded Hashtag Engagement (CBHE).



**Figure 2.** Repeated measures ANCOVA for Creativity dimensions.

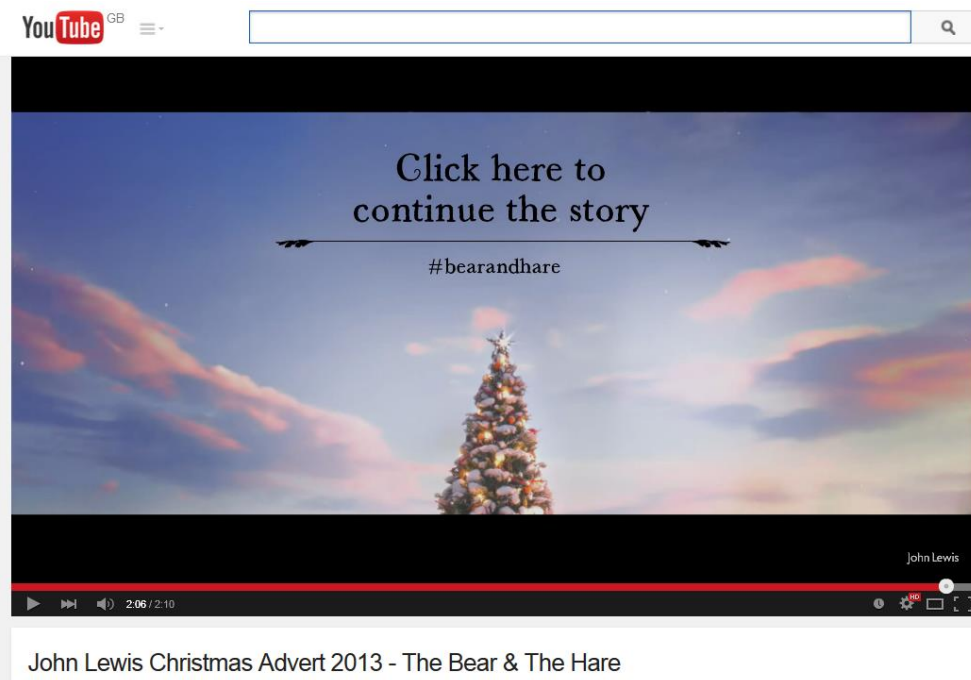


## APPENDIX 1

### The Bear and Hare Storyline



(Screenshots retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqWig2WARb0>)



John Lewis Christmas Advert 2013 - The Bear & The Hare

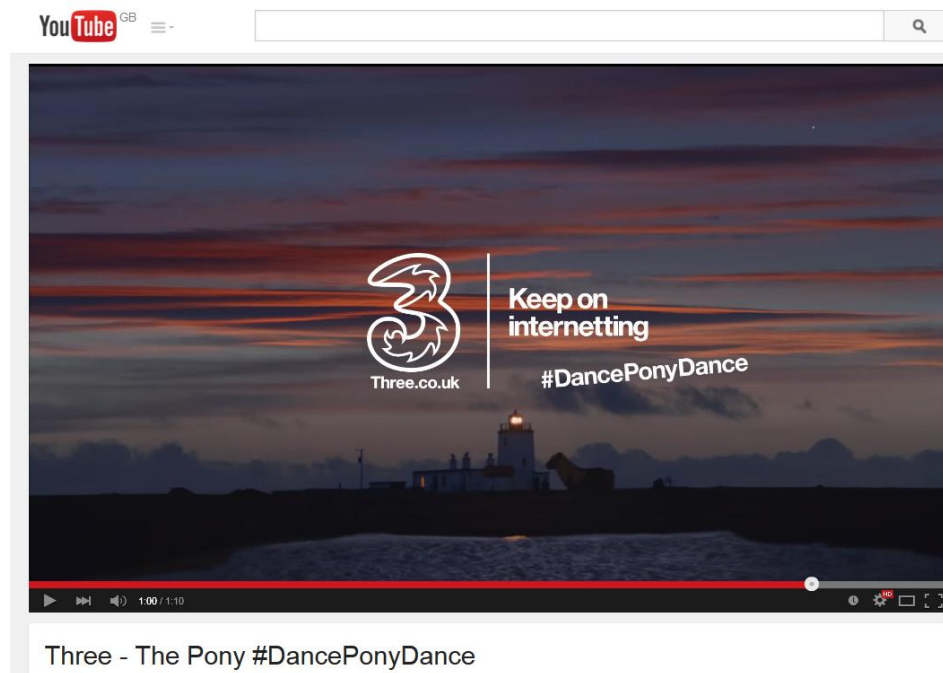
Source: John Lewis, #BearandHare, YouTube 2015,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqWig2WARb0>

## APPENDIX 2

### Dance Pony Dance Storyline



(Screenshots retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ekr05T9Iaio>)



Source: 3Mobile #DancePonyDance, YouTube, 2015:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ekr05T9Iaio>

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